

**Testimony
of
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**to the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies**

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The National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) is a nonpartisan, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. The Alliance analyzes policy and develops pragmatic, cost-effective policy solutions as we work collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity to help homeless individuals and families make positive changes in their lives. We provide data and research to policymakers and elected officials in order to inform policy debates and educate the public and opinion leaders nationwide.

The Alliance urges Congress to provide \$165 million in FY 2010 for the Second Chance Act, including:

- \$55 million for the Adult and Juvenile Offender State and local Reentry Demonstration Projects;
- \$15 million for the Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations.

In addition, the Alliance urges Congress to increase federal funding to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), and particularly to provide for the following programs:

- \$95 million to the Title V Incentive Grants;
- \$80 million to the Juvenile Mentoring Programs;
- \$89 million to the Title II State Formula Grants; and
- \$250 million to the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant.

The Alliance appreciates the passage of the Second Chance Act and Congress' continued support of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act programs.

The Alliance believes that, with adequate planning and resources, the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems can be improved to ensure adults and youth released from detention or placement can return to their communities and avoid recidivism and homelessness. In communities around the country, model programs have proven, positive outcomes in assisting adults and youth to gain employment and secure housing to avoid repeated incarceration.

Adults and juveniles leaving incarceration are at great risk of homelessness in the best of times. During a period when jobs are hard to come by, this risk is greatly increased, and with homelessness comes a greater risk of new offenses and re-incarceration. To prevent homelessness and the accompanying cost to taxpayers and the individuals involved, it is essential that the criminal and juvenile justice system receive the funding necessary to offer diversion to incarceration, improved discharge planning, and links to reentry services, with help finding and retaining housing as an essential aspect of the services provided. We offer this testimony to urge Congress to fully fund the Second Chance Act and the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act programs as a significant step toward addressing these goals.

Appropriations to Second Chance Act programs:

In 2007, federal and state prisons released 725,000 people back into their communities. Nine million more were released from local jails. Most released adults face challenges in employment and housing, and research confirms that over half will be re-incarcerated within three years of their release. By providing resources under the Second Chance Act to coordinate re-entry services at the state and local levels, Congress will help dismantle the revolving door in and out of prisons and jails.

Research confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help formerly incarcerated adults find stable employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism. For example:

- In Maryland, the Maryland Reentry Partnership Initiative provides prisoners with reentry services. A 2007 evaluation found the clients committed fewer crimes than prisoners in a control group that did not receive the same reentry services.
- In Illinois, The Safer Foundation's Transitional Employment Program resulted in 61 percent lower recidivism rates for adults who completed the program.
- In Kansas, the Kansas Department of Correction's pilot program offered services to targeted adults with mental health problems and substance abuse disorders which resulted in only 32 percent returning to prison as compared to 82 percent for those adults who did not participate in the program.
- In New York, La Bodega de la Familia provided services to adults with substance abuse disorders, and to their families. Its clients were less likely to use any illegal drug than the companion group, and less likely to be arrested and convicted within six months from the release.

The Second Chance Act passed with bipartisan support and deserves investment in proven programs to expand reentry programs, reduce recidivism and offer communities improved public safety. These programs, if fully funded, will improve coordination and reentry services and policies at the state and local levels. The Alliance urges Congress to appropriate \$165 million for Second Chance Act programs for FY2010, including \$55 million for the Adult and Juvenile Offender State and Local Reentry Demonstration Projects, and \$15 million for the Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Programs.

Appropriations to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Programs

Homeless youth often come into contact with the juvenile justice system as status offenders, i.e. engaging in activities that would be legal if engaged in by adults. This can include activities such as curfew violations that are essentially unavoidable for homeless youth.¹ Conversely, many juveniles who were living with their families before becoming involved with the juvenile justice system are not welcome or able to return to their families upon discharge from correctional systems. Without family support adequate community-based resources or appropriate housing (adult housing is often not available to or appropriate for youth), they too often become homeless. Therefore, the Alliance urges Congress to increase appropriations to JJDPa programs for two purposes. The first is to keep youth out of the corrections system by diverting those with mental health or substance abuse disorders into community-based programs. The second is to support reentry programs that prevent youth from entering a cycle of homelessness and recidivism.

Involvement in juvenile corrections is all too frequent an occurrence for homeless youth (living on their own or with their families). Research studies of homeless street youth in 1989² and 1996³ showed that a disproportionate number had a history of juvenile detention and most of those had multiple detentions. Studies of homeless youth in Minnesota (2003 and 2006) found that one-third of all homeless youth had a history of juvenile justice placements.⁴ A study of homeless youth conducted by Covenant House in New York reported that 30 percent had been previously detained or incarcerated.⁵

This involvement leaves the juvenile justice system well positioned to have a positive impact on youth. The JJDPa programs offer a wide range of coordinated services and resources for state and local programs that are designed to reduce risks of delinquency, enhance prevention efforts for youth at risk of entering the juvenile justice system, and provide intervention for first-time and non-serious offenders. JJDPa's programmatic framework expands community programs to support youth fleeing abuse and neglect to avoid engaging in criminal activity, diverts youth from incarceration and deepening

¹ National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and the National Network for Youth. 2003. *Alone Without a Home: A State-by-State Review of Laws Affecting Unaccompanied Youth*. Washington, D.C.

² Robertson, M. 1989. *Homeless youth in Hollywood: Patterns of alcohol use*. Report to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Berkley: Alcohol Research Group.

³ Clark, R. and Robertson, M. 1996. *Surviving the Moment: A report on homeless youth in San Francisco*. Berkley: Alcohol Research Group.

⁴ Owens, G. 2007 *Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2006*, Wilder Research Center, St. Paul, Minnesota.

⁵ Covenant House, 2001.

involvement with the juvenile justice system, and offers opportunities to provide reentry services for youth transitioning back to their families and communities.

Despite the importance of these programs and the evidence-based outcomes they offer to juveniles and communities, many funds suffered drastic cuts since FY2002: JABG funding was reduced 71 percent; Title V Incentive Grants were reduced 35 percent; and Title II State Formula Grants were reduced 16 percent.

The Alliance is concerned that without sufficient investment in diversion and community-based alternatives to juvenile justice detention and incarceration, many runaway youth will be caught up in a cycle of incarceration and homelessness which can extend into their adult years. It is important to interrupt this cycle through prevention efforts. It should also be noted that many of these programs emphasize strengthening families, a powerful approach for preventing homelessness as well as preventing delinquency.

Specifically, the Alliance asks Congress to consider the following levels of funding:

- **\$95 million to the Title V Incentive Grants.** The Title V Incentive Grants program funds collaborative, community-based delinquency prevention efforts to reach youth in high-risk environments to build skills and make positive choices. Title V funds have been used for home visitation, mentoring, after-school activities, tutoring services, truancy and drop out reduction programs. Youth who are involved with a mentor are 52 percent less likely to skip a day of school and 46 percent less likely to begin using drugs. A growing body of research indicates that early investment in youth development and prevention programs reduces youth crime and violence.
- **\$80 million to the Juvenile Mentoring Programs.** The Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) supports community-based mentoring services to children and their families that encourage positive behavior and involvement with activities to promote positive youth development. An evaluation of the Big Brother/Big Sisters mentoring program showed that BBBSA youth were: 46% less likely to use drugs, 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use, almost one-third less likely to hit someone, and less likely to exhibit poor academic behavior, attitudes, and performance than youth in a control group that did not receive mentoring.
- **\$89 million to the Title II State Formula Grants.** State Formula grants from OJJDP provide funds directly to states to help them implement comprehensive state juvenile justice plans based on detailed studies of local needs. While homeless youth are only a fraction of all youth in juvenile justice placements, their unique needs warrant special planning and coordination in state juvenile justice plans and sufficient funding should be offered to encourage local planning and accountability to meet the diverse needs of homeless youth and other special need populations.

- **\$250 million to the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG).** The JABG Program provides state and local governments with resources to expand programs and promote accountability in the juvenile justice system. Funds are available for many purposes including: building or expanding detention facilities; training personnel; hiring additional judges, prosecutors, probation officers, and court-appointed defenders; and funding pre-trial services. Additionally, eligible activities include substance abuse programs, mental health screening, gang prevention, and reentry services. By preventing homelessness youth, or re-housing those who are already homeless, this program helps prevent their incarceration.

Evidence-based programs offering community mentoring, family counseling, mental health services, respite shelter, youth housing models, and reentry services (as eligible activities under Title V and JABG) provide an opportunity to divert youth from detention, recidivism, and homelessness in their young adult years. The Second Chance Act and JJDPAs support a critical network of services which have the potential to improve community safety and mitigate youth homelessness.

The Alliance is deeply grateful for Subcommittee's leadership and support of the Second Chance Act and JJDPAs programs and resources, and thanks you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The Alliance looks forward to working with Congress to secure vital federal investment in today's young generation.